

J: oh it's already recording? It's ok we'll cut out like a minute or two from this one, yeah.

S: Ok. Who wants to go first?

J: You

S: Oh, I do?

(We laugh)

S: Ok, great. So, following up from the last recording... I thought quite a lot about the question that I know we are meant to answer which is: 'what is the thing...' what was the question? 'what is the thing you're reading...'?

J: 'what are you reading now and... what's the most important thing that you're reading, or what's the most relevant thing'

S: to your practice, yes.

J: yes

S: I've read a bunch of things and I found all of these things quite interesting and relevant but they lacked something. After our beloved Laura Mulvey

(We laugh)

I've read other chapters and bits from different books: Jacqueline Rose's *Sexuality in the field of vision* I didn't read the whole

Commented [1]: Rose, J. (2005) *Sexuality in the field of vision*. 2nd edn. London: Verso.

book. It's quite interesting. There's a lot Freud, again, which, I'm like 'I got it! Can we move on with our lives?'

(J and M laugh and nod)

And then Judith Butler's *Bodies that matter* which I found quite hard to read to be honest with you guys. It was dense, and yes it was interesting but not very easy to read.

I also wanted to have a look at the history of the feminist film theory. This is a book that I have since my BA, *Cinema studies: the key concepts* by Susan Hayward, it's this big dictionary where you can look up the main concepts of film studies. And it's quite nice 'cause it sums up the different waves of feminism and feminist film theory as a consequence. So that was good just to have a little overview of how it evolved.

I read some chapters from this other book, *Feminism and the visual culture reader*, it has articles and essays from different authors. It's interesting because this edition is the second one so I think from 2010 maybe? So not too old and fairly up to date. In here I found texts from the 70s like Mulvey and Berger and then very recent pieces.

Something that I realised this morning: I was re-reading the very first paragraph of the introduction, she is writing this not long ago and yet so much has happened in the meantime. I'm just gonna read a couple of lines, the person writing is the editor of the book, Amelia Jones, the title of the introduction is 'Conceiving the intersection of feminism and visual culture, again': 'I write this revised version of my original introduction to the first edition of 'Feminism and the visual culture reader' over

Commented [4]: Jones, A. (ed.) (2010) The feminism and visual culture reader. 2nd edn. London and New York: Routledge.

Commented [2]: Butler, J. (2011) Bodies that matter. 2nd edn. London and New York: Routledge.

Commented [3]: Hayward, S. (2013) Cinema studies: the key concepts. 4th edn. London and New York: Routledge.

half a decade later on January 20th 2009, the day of Barack Obama's inauguration as president of the United States". So, even just this, she writes this second edition in 2009 which is only 10 years ago which for academic theories it's a fairly short amount of time. I'm imagining Jones writing this as Barack Obama gets ready to be the president and then...that ended. And now Trump is the president of the US and everything that is happening in Alabama. So it's interesting because when we look at Mulvey's stuff, or that wave of feminism in general, we see it as very outdated but then also a text from 2009 can show us how times have changed so quickly and how some things have even gone backwards.

So, these are the main texts I have been reading. Plus, the article that Marieke recommended and some other articles on an online magazine that Kate Briggs suggested called 'Another gaze'.

All this was interesting and informative but I realised that nothing was very specific to me and to my practice, and what I understood is that the main thing that right now relates to my practice is the work of a director, which I already spoke about in this group, Jill Soloway, because I really like their work and because I have read several interviews and articles that she wrote. *They* wrote, 'cause now they are not a she anymore. I find not just the films, but also the kind of discourses and the kind of conversations they are trying to have to be very interesting and relevant and perhaps even more up to date compared to some academic texts that I have been reading; it's just a different platform, I guess.

And, funny enough, I remembered that I wrote some notes years ago and I managed to find them. I was listening to Jill Soloway's

Commented [5]: www.anothergaze.com

talk on the female gaze, and this was like 3 years ago, and the notes I took are basically very similar in content to the notes I've been taking recently on these other texts. So, the talk starts with Soloway summing up Mulvey's *Visual pleasure in narrative cinema* just to state what the male gaze is, as intended in classical american cinema, or white cinema anyways, first world cinema. Let's call it first world cinema.

Soloway tries to explain that we have established what is, or at least was, the male gaze – I'm not going to go through that again cause we know what it is, right? – and I like that at the beginning of the talk Soloway establishes her position saying (I'll paraphrase) 'I am white, I lived most of my life as a straight female, in the United States, so I am aware that there is a ton of other issues but I am not informed enough to make a proper and fair argument. So, I am aware that there are issues of race and

class and other things but for now I'm just going to talk about the female gaze'.

I appreciate this kind of approach of 'I know only about this thing so let's not have an uninformed opinion about other things.'

Soloway talks a lot about intersectionality. There is a point that I find interesting and I don't know if it's exactly relevant to my practice but I think it might. It's a quote from this talk that is 'Art is propaganda for the self'. I don't know if you agree, but it made me think that maybe it's true. For some people in a more conscious way, for some people may be less but this quote really stuck with me.

Then Soloway starts to explore what is the female gaze, there are 3 points – this piece of paper with notes is from 3 years ago, so I

Commented [6]: A transcript of Soloway's talk is available here: <https://www.toppleproductions.com/the-female-gaze>

don't know how well I took these notes so maybe I'm leaving bits out - feeling seen, the gazed gaze and the returning gaze; the female doesn't want to be the object anymore but wants to be the subject. Soloway also talks a lot about camera movement and a sort of different way of using the camera, something more instinctual that does not necessarily care too much about the whole illusion, the whole cinematic illusion. It's interesting because the films that Soloway makes are still narrative films, they are not crazy experimental, but watching them I can sort of see that there is a difference, there is less...it's hard to explain, I should have brought screenshots!



But when she talks about female gaze it's a lot about the actual language of cinema, how you move the camera, it's quite specific – Feel free to interrupt whenever you like!

And then, this other piece of notes! I watched *I love Dick* the TV adaptation of Chris Kraus' book, directed by Soloway. I can't remember how many episodes are there, not too many. I really liked it. These notes that I rediscovered are interesting to me, I remember watching it and writing down things that I noticed, that seemed worthy of writing down. One is 'sexual consent within a long a term relationship: when she refuses to give her husband a blow job and he makes her feel guilty. Or does she make herself feel guilty? She has a fascination for the macho, the cowboy, which is the guy, Dick, and on the opposite, there is her husband who is this intellectual man who is not very macho.

Have you guys watched it? Or read the book?

M: I've read about it

S: ok, so more or less you know the story?

M: yes

S: there is a moment in episode 1 where Dick is looking straight into the camera during a dinner scene telling the protagonist that she doesn't really want to be a filmmaker and that there are not really good female filmmakers. She goes to this dinner with him and her husband and she really wants to impress him because she is a filmmaker but she is not very successful, she makes experimental weird films and she gets really offended and loses her temper while these two men are looking at her with the classic 'oh you silly, emotional woman' look while they are very calm and cool.

Commented [7]: I love Dick. (2016). Amazon Video, 19 August

Commented [8]: Kraus, C. (1997) I love Dick. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).



And then I made all these other notes like ‘the editing is great!!!’ with all the exclamation marks and ‘the soundtrack is perfect!!!’

J and M laugh as I theatrically quote my own notes and swing my arms in excitement for the production values of ‘I love Dick’.

S: then there is this note which I am assuming is something that she says? ‘dead films are like dead babies’ and then there is a *creativity as ovulation... I don’t know why I wrote this down hahaha but, anyways. There is also in my notes the whole idea of the female monster: women should always be good mothers and when they are not, they become this monster.

And then (more notes): she uses Dick as her muse, the object of her desire and she writes almost pornography about him and Dick finds this humiliating.

I don't know how much of this actually happened because the tv adaptation is based on the book and the book is based on a real-life experience, I don't know how truthful this whole thing is. But I tried to put it in a context: we are talking about people in their... I don't know, how old is Chris Kraus? 50?

M: yes, I think so

S: something like that. And Dick, this guy, is maybe 60? I don't know, I'm just assuming from the look of Kevin Bacon on the screen. So, what I mean is that this kind of dynamic of subverting the gaze and staring at him, desiring him, writing this very sensual letters about him and for him, using him for her own pleasure is this very classic reverse power structure. I find it interesting cause it's something that that generation of artists in general perhaps felt the need to do more than people do now.

Maybe now we are just barely passed that point, but for them it was subversive at the time.

This all thing is to say that I felt that this is probably not what was asked of me for this assignment, but the main thing that is relevant to me right now is actually reading Soloway's films with complementary information coming from academic texts. Analysing the body of work of Jill Soloway, it's relevant for me. She also wrote, oh I keep on saying she but she is not a she. The main things that they have written and directed are *Transparent* which is a TV show, *I love Dick* and then there is the feature film *Afternoon Delight*. Soloway's work triggered my interest in feminist film theory. First of all because I admire their work as a filmmaker, I just really enjoy watching these pieces. And I also realised that in the work that Soloway makes there is a lot of theoretical and academic knowledge. It's very intentional.

Commented [9]: Chris Kraus was born in 1955.
Dick Hebdige was born in 1951.
Sylvère Lotringer (Kraus' husband) was born in 1938.

Soloway has an interesting story as a person because she went from being a straight woman, married, with kids, and now they present themselves as a non-binary person. Neither male nor female. Biologically they are female but they don't want to be in either box, they just want to exist as a person. This is an interesting journey in itself. Soloway is not a philosopher as such because she does not have a Ph. D, but as a thinker is a very modern person who is very aware of the importance of intersectionality and I admire that.

J: can you explain to me what intersectionality is? Just to be clearer on the term

S: yes, the way I see intersectionality it's that is a place where different forms of oppression get together and are linked. So, as we are aware, feminism from the 70s achieved some great things

but it was very white and very straight so it left out several other oppressed groups. To me if one declares to be an intersectional feminist it means that they are also aware of other groups that are oppressed and in their fight, they don't leave them out. Is that also how you guys see it?

J: I like this vocabulary

M: yeah, me too!

J: but I can't really say yes or no. It sounds that if you have read related literature you would know this term but if you haven't it's more academic the way...

S: what do you mean? sorry, go ahead

Commented [10]: Jill Soloway graduated from the University of Wisconsin–Madison as a communications arts major.

J: it's just my experience with the word, I just don't know this word in this context

S: I only know it in this context. I hear it and use it in conversations about human rights. So, for example the Black Lives Matter movement it's very important but to make it intersectional it should not forget about queer people, you know? So, to me personally being a feminist means being an intersectional feminist, so I want equal rights for all genders but I also want equal rights for all races, sexual orientations, classes. That's how I see it. Don't quote me on the definition of the term though! It's the place where everyone that is defined as 'other', everyone that is oppressed, comes together.

M: I think for me is the same cause when I read that book *Why I'm not a feminist* they also explain it in the same way. And I also

read about how the first wave of feminism left a lot of people out and that also relates to human rights but I don't see it a lot in film theory

S: yes, is not about film theory, it's more about feminism in general and human rights. Cause if you're a feminist but you are let's say Islamophobic then you are not doing intersectionality right. You are doing it wrong!

M: in the book *Why I'm not a feminist* she says that when they were fighting for jobs nobody was fighting to become a cleaning lady, everyone was fighting to become a lawyer because women of colour already did the lower paid jobs

Commented [11]: From the Oxford Dictionary of English: intersectionality | ɪntəˈsekʃəˈnælɪti | noun [mass noun] the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage: through an awareness of intersectionality, we can better acknowledge and ground the differences among us.

S: that's a very good example, yes. I think class it's a very big component of it. At least in Europe or in the US class and race are very much linked.

So all this content, which is academic but also comes from articles and magazines and podcasts, I find it super interesting and I really enjoyed reading, listening and watching all of it. I want to keep this knowledge and I hope it will inform my practice and also just me as a person.

When I make my work I'm not thinking if I am being intersectional enough, I hope I am but let's face it I am probably not. I don't want to be too self-conscious about it while I am making things as I already tend to overthink.

I am trying to read Soloway's films just as films, as visual art. I am looking at the language used in these pieces. For example, in *I love Dick* I remember a few interesting things: it's a narrative

based TV show, it's very entertaining, in a way it is mainstream. But there are a few notes on this: the use of title cards reminds me of early silent cinema, they are also modern as they use this bright red and bold font and they are not part of the credits, they are in the middle of the episode like 'DEAR DICK' WRITTEN REALLY BIG ON THE SCREEN.

There is also voice over. There is a beautiful episode where all the female characters deliver a monologue, there is a beautiful landscape, dry, desert like. They talk about Dick and how they got to know him as artists or colleagues; but really the monologue is about themselves as artists. At some point there is a choreography but it's a little strange because it's not fully diegetic. Soloway in this specific case has a very different aesthetic and language that I believe it's worth looking at and taking in. Especially because she uses all these elements, the title cards, the choreography, the voice overs, the monologues, the

looking straight into the camera, she uses all these things in the setting of a narrative piece, a traditional narrative. I almost feel that I want to steal, be inspired by Soloway's style. I really really like it. It's fascinating to me. I think what I will do is take a scene and analyse it almost shot by shot or something like that. I searched a lot on jstor and there is almost zero literature on Soloway. I guess I'm gonna use the other texts as a support, a theoretical support and then just read the films.



J: how does this relate to what you are making now? Or can you talk a little bit about what you are making now?

S: yes, you are right, I forgot! Slightly forgot about that!

J and M laugh.

S: the main thing I am working on now is this project with the polaroids. I took pictures of parts of my body with a polaroid camera and I apply this process of 'destroying' the picture and I end up with one layer of this photograph that then I can re-apply onto another surface. But without getting too much into the technique, that's another conversation, I was never and I'm still not comfortable in front of the camera. It makes me cringe. Not just because I don't like my image in the picture but also, I'm not too sure what to do and it makes me very uncomfortable.

I never took pictures of myself, I think I'm one of the few humans that does not take selfies. I just don't see the purpose of it. What do I do with that? This whole thing of photographing myself is very new to me.

In mainstream visual culture the woman is usually the object that is looked at, having this privilege to being able to instead point the camera at whatever I want and choosing to pointing it at myself - this specific act is really framed into this conversation that creators of images that are not strictly straight white men we have managed to get this far and changed the usual language of cinema. Out of all the things that I could have taken photos of I have taken pictures of myself. So, this fascination with this director, my interest in these texts in general...I keep on using my hands as if the phone could record my gestures, I'm moving them a lot FYI!

J and M laugh -

I forgot what I was saying...

As someone who would like to create culture and have the chance to do so in the context of this institute, I'm exploring this usually theoretical topic in a more practical way. I've read a lot about male and female gaze and I watched a lot of things, both from the 20th and 21st century, I'm trying to wrap up these interests and this knowledge into something that I actually do. I just pointed the camera at myself and I'll see where that takes me with keeping in mind where I came from. Does this make sense?

J and M nod

J: You mentioned...cause you put Jill Soloway as your... you are going to study her very closely, or them. Are you considering her cause of her...her, sorry their! Their, their, their! Are you considering them because of their relevance in this is body of theory and how it aligns with your own view? Or more about the aesthetics? Cause you said it's beautiful!

S: I was attracted to Soloway's work at first because of the aesthetics, I didn't even think about what this director has read and what they have studied. I just really loved the aesthetic choices, this looks just amazing and interesting and it's different and yet very entertaining, you know? That was the first layer. And then I realised that, like us, Soloway read all these mountains of texts. Cause once you read these texts you can't avoid seeing the theories on the screen.

But the main thing that I find interesting is that Soloway is talking about this search, cause they have not found it yet, **this search for the female gaze**. The male gaze has theories and rules, the female gaze does not have that yet and Soloway attempts to draw a few things. So the way I see it, maybe Soloway does not agree, is that those aesthetic choices I just mentioned are the search for a gaze that is not the usual one.



And I am doing the same search, as someone that grew up in a conservative country and watched that kind of media, I feel that the established gaze is very much part of myself as all the things you watch and read in life. Can I just leave all that behind? Can I at least remember all that but manage to put in on the side and move on? Let's look for something more interesting, more progressive, more inclusive. Does this make any sense?

M: it does, yes. Definitely. With your polaroid project do you see a connection with intersectionality?

S: Not so much to be honest. Because it's very personal work, I am pointing the camera at myself. I think it's probably the opposite of intersectionality. It's such a specific topic.

As a human being in general I try to be aware of things that surround me, I would like to have that kind of humanist approach that we spoke about: don't leave the others out while you are fighting for yourself.

In this specific moment I am just doing my search, how do I look at things? How do I look at myself? Having a female body, how do I then present it?

Soloway is an inspiration, if I had a mood board Soloway would be there, the style, the choices, the camera movement, the editing, the writing. **What relates my work to these readings, of the texts and the films, is the search for a fresh, a freer perspective.**

J: when you say that you have never taken selfies, or you were never motivated to do so, that to me is a such a refreshing

perspective. Because now the act of pointing the camera to yourself is almost... a lot of us don't even think about it, or have stopped thinking about it. Now, since we are in this course we reflect on this more. In the past I have reflected on it more as a cultural phenomenon. But I don't really think about the relationship between the camera, the gaze and the self.

As you are searching it sounds very...almost profound that you pick this journey in this direction. It's already really courageous to do something that you didn't find easy before. A part from the theories, the drive to do this is also something that is very interesting to hear.

S: and something that I thought about afterwards: after all the readings I was gathering my thoughts to prepare for this research group and I realised that this director that I am so fascinated by, Jill Soloway, has made this other really important work

Transparent which is autobiographical. It talks about the family she grew up in, the journey that she made from being a straight female to being a non-binary person. And *I love Dick* is based on Chris Kraus' book which is also autobiographical. This link with autobiography and personal topics is not intentional.

I am aware that I grew up in a catholic country, watching really bad TV...so bad. And from a young age I was looked at in a certain way by men and I accepted it because I thought that's how it is. Is that normal?

M: I remember that I had this conversation with my sister once when I was around 13 and I told her 'I notice now that boys look at me differently but also girls, I feel that girls look at me now wondering if they are better or not' you know? Like in high school? Who is prettier?

J and S agree

M: It's the moment you realise you are not a child anymore and I remember it as kind of traumatic actually, it's weird and horrible that from that point on when you cross the street that there is a possibility that you get catcalled which just does not happen when you are a kid. And then you have to deal with all of this stuff.

S: I remember the very first time that I was catcalled, I was like
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J: wow

S: I was like 'sorry, what?' I didn't understand what the man said and then my sister was with me and she started shouting at him and insulting him and I wasn't even sure about what had just happened. Did he ask for directions? What's going on here? I really did not have a clue.

M: I remember I became super self-aware from that point, I felt less safe everywhere. You become so aware of what you look like and what you are. I think there is a similarity with you that I hated taking selfies. At the beginning of the year I took like 30 selfies and I destroyed all of them. Remember? I just printed them on regular paper and i dunked thinner on top of it and then removed the ink. I had a talk with the tutor and they said that it really spoke of self-hate. But it wasn't that, I was just trying to erase your own presence, or trying to make it different

S: more than presence is this thing of existing while you are been looked at. Can we just remove the being looked at part? Can we just exist?

M: yes, it was an attempt to do that, to remove that feeling

S: yes, that layer. I don't hate taking selfies, I just never do it. I took selfies for practical reasons like if I don't have a mirror then I'll use my phone, but then I delete the pictures. But otherwise I don't see the point, what would I even do with a selfie? I guess the bottom line is that I am afraid that this so-called male gaze I cannot escape it, escape it not as the object that is being looked at but as someone that also looks at things and makes things. In that way. I am afraid that maybe I was influenced too much. Maybe I'm just being paranoid, i'm overthinking this for sure. For me is a very recent thing to consider myself an artist, so as I am

looking for my own way of making things, my own style and voice, I am also aware of where I come from. I would like to make something different.

J: What I find interesting is...when you said that in your polaroid project you are pointing the camera at yourself and then for you in the insomnia project you are also pointing the camera at yourself. What is the difference between this and the selfie?

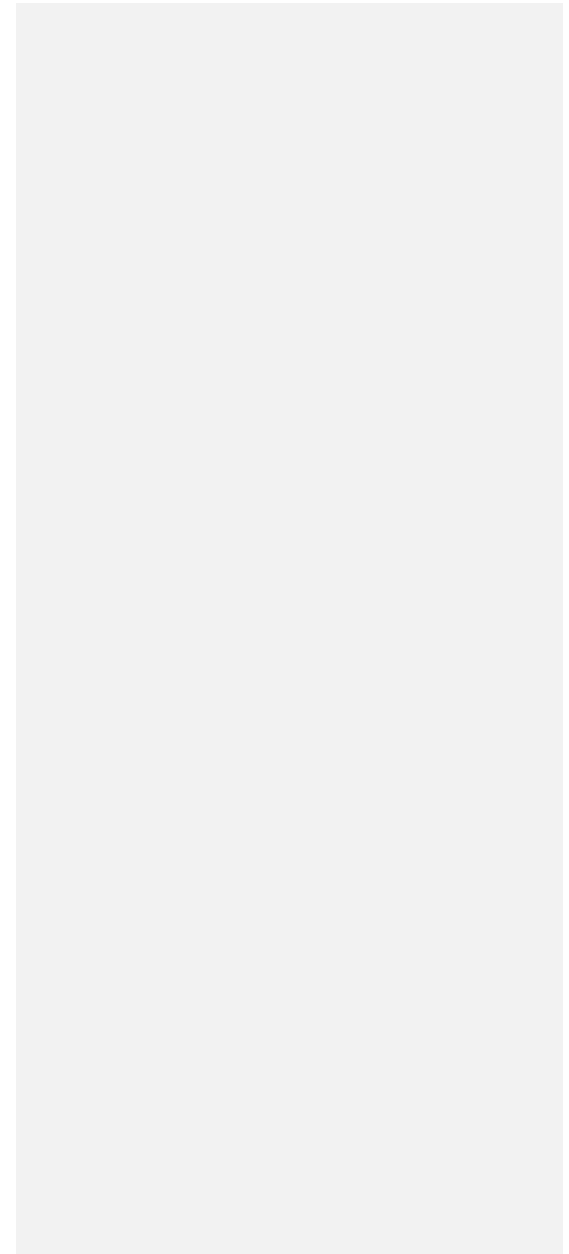
M: With the insomnia project at first when I filmed myself, I did wonder if I was making a narcissist thing? It was so weird to make recordings of myself. Why would you do this? And later when I was reading the book about mirrors and reflections in cinema, I thought that making recordings of yourself is like looking in the mirror. But if you take a selfie you try to take a good portrait, when you are filming yourself while unable to

sleep you can try to look nice but it's way more difficult. Or at least that's how I felt. I felt way more vulnerable and even if I did post these photos, they would just look ridiculous or weird. I wouldn't always be happy with the way I presented myself in front of the camera but I still kept them and i showed them.

So I guess there is a big difference but I think when I look at a selfie is not the same as in a mirror and maybe it's a bit coincidental the moment you turn around and you look and think of adjusting your hair; but the moment you take a selfie everything is already in place and you keep taking more until you take the perfect one. With the insomnia recordings there is never a perfect recording, which is the whole point. At first, I thought I would as many as possible until it would look natural which of course it's impossible because it's not natural to point a camera at yourself at night. But i think what I meant is until it

feels more honest, cause in some recordings you see the exhaustion, and in some others, you wonder what is this girl doing on her bed? Maybe you don't really get the link with exhaustion. A lot of them are interesting in different ways. It's nice to have some questions about narcissism, self-reflection because also when I asked you about intersectionality there was also a worry about my own work, cause all of this is self-portraits. This doesn't really touch the lives of many other people, except if they also experience insomnia, but I don't know if it engages with society or maybe it will later. But I think it's something that is important.

That's also why this project was sometimes troubling for me because I thought who am I making this for? Which is something that you have in mind when you make something.



J: it can also just be for yourself. I think a lot of work I make, now that I look at it, it's for myself. And maybe some other people would relate, or recognise themselves. But some much of what I make, I make it because it's important for me. In the past I always felt that I had to justify the work in some other way.

M: exactly

J: but these days I'm like... just make it!